



NEWS RELEASE

MAYOR COLEEN J. SENG



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Lincoln-Lancaster Women's Commission 440 S. 8th St., Ste. 100 Lincoln NE 68508-2294 402/441-7716 FAX 402/441-6824

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FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Bonnie Coffey, 441-8695

Diane Mullins, 441-7717

*Winners' pictures available upon request

WOMEN'S COMMISSION HONORS AWARD RECIPIENTS

"Weaving Women's Voices" pays tribute to annual award winners in saluting International Women's Day

The Lincoln-Lancaster Women's Commission, along with Friends of the Commission, will host an awards luncheon in recognition of International Women's Day to celebrate its 28th annual event, **"Weaving Women's Voices."** Scheduled for Friday, March 5, 2004, the event will be held at the Cornhusker Hotel, 333 South 13th Street., Lincoln, Neb. Doors open at 11 a.m. and the program starts promptly at 11:30 a.m. The keynote speaker will be Mayor Coleen J. Seng.

The Lincoln-Lancaster Women's Commission announces the following award recipients:

- The *Alice Paul Award* is presented to a woman whose life's work reflects her dedication to the struggle for women's equality. **Dr. Gerise Herndon**, an associate professor of English and director of Women's Studies at Nebraska Wesleyan University (NWU), promotes education, awareness and change through her contact with students, staff and the community at large. Working through leadership opportunities, her teaching methods and volunteer activities with a variety of community organizations have left a positive impact on many individuals. Her feminist perspective is not separated into distinct compartments, but encompasses all facets of her professional and personal life. Gerise has been instrumental in creating growth and expansion within the Women's Studies program. This is attributed to her efforts and her vision, coupled with careful attention to curriculum development, recruitment and day-to-day administrative and program assessments. Gerise's involvement at NWU included working on the Women's Commission, serving as a member of the President's Council on Diversity, Personal Harassment Resource Person, and serving as local chapter president of the American Association of University Professors. Her local involvement has included volunteering to staff the Rape Spouse Abuse Crisis Center hotline, serving as board member on the University Place Community Organization and on the Northeast Family Resource Center board. Internationally speaking, she is a member of the National Women's Studies Association and participated in several workshops held in Costa Rica, West Africa and Cuba. Gerise is deeply committed to equity issues, outspoken on issues of race, gender, and sexual orientation, and pay equity. Gerise is a tireless worker for issues of inclusiveness and tolerance. She has made her classrooms a laboratory for pluralism, creating class work that teaches about such issues as gender and racial discrimination and empowerment. (Contact info, NWU: 465-2347, cgh@nebrwesleyan.edu)

- The *Erasmus Correll Award* is presented to a man who has exhibited outstanding commitment through his individual leadership and community involvement to the issues affecting women and has encouraged and supported women in their pursuit of equal status and an enhanced quality of life. **Rev. Lauren D. Ekdahl**, who has served as pastor of Trinity United Methodist Church for the past 13 years, has kept his commitment to improve the quality of life for women in the community. His first assignment as a young theology student was to work on the Role and Status of Women Commission during the early 70's. This experience grounded him well in understanding women's issues. Married to Shirley and father of three daughters, Rev. Ekdahl has been involved and participated in a wide variety of women-oriented activities from coaching a girl's softball team to teaching classes on aging sponsored by the United Methodist Women. Through his personal and professional endeavors, he is known to be a man sensitive to diversity and inclusiveness. Whether its working one-on-one with a parishioner making a tough life decision, taking a public stand in a letter to the editor, or leading a Legislative Day workshop for Church Women United., Rev. Ekdahl follows what he believes to be the moral path - even when it's not socially popular. He has worked many years on women's health issues, served on Gov. Exon's State Health Coordinating Council, and held many community leadership positions on boards such as Lincoln Interfaith Council, Nebraska Rural Health Association, Planned Parenthood of Nebraska and Council Bluffs, Nebraskans Against the Death Penalty, Amnesty International, Nebraskans for Peace, Methodist Federal for Social Action and Interchurch Ministries of Nebraska Health Concerns Committee. Rev. Ekdahl demonstrated his support for women and their issues at a time when few men had the courage to publicly advocate equality for women and promote change. (Contact info, w: 435-2946 or h: 420-1274)
- The *Woman Artist - Performing Arts Award* is presented to a local woman artist who excels in her work as deemed by peers and colleagues, and to support the arts in the community. **Judith K. Hart** excels as a performer, director, teacher and role model in the art of performance. She is the co-founder and executive director of the Angels Theatre Company, a Lincoln performance group of professional actors, designers, directors, writers, visual artists, musicians, and dancers who collaborate to create. The company's mission is to provide opportunities for Lincoln talent, to nurture original works, to promote and encourage professional artistic growth and to allow members access to a community of supportive mentors. Judith also serves as a contact for new artists in town, and helps them find ways to explore and perform their own art. She has directed 11 theater productions, acted in 27 plays, worked in seven film and television performances including Walt Disney Productions, Union Pacific and Godfather's Pizza, and has taught at Doane College, the Rensselaerville Institute, Arts Are Basic Aesthetic Institute and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Currently, she is instrumental in directing *The Vagina Monologues* to help raise money for Fresh Start Home and Rape/Spouse Abuse Crisis Center. Judith's work with students and the community at large has led them to use drama as a learning vehicle for examining complex social issues, learning about other cultures and lifestyles, and promoting artistic growth within the community. (Contact information: 474-2206, judithkhart@aol.com)
- The *Young Feminist Award* is presented to a young woman or man who, through actions or by example, attempts to enhance the quality of life for girls or women at school, home, place of worship or in the community. **Miss Sarah L. Mason**, a Lincoln Southeast High School senior, is described as a self-motivated and dynamic young woman who is dedicated to equality. Sarah is the daughter of Sally Mason, a substitute teacher for Lincoln Public Schools, and Tom Mason,

administrator at the College of Nursing, University of Nebraska Medical Center. Sarah has donated countless hours of volunteer time to in an effort to educate her peers, making their world a safer place to live. She has given a great deal of time to school, church and community groups while maintaining excellent grades and participating in theater and music. Sarah is a good role model, well liked by other students and admired by the faculty. Sarah helped with the coordination of the Students for Peace Benefit Night last May. The proceeds for that event, which was a talent show of student acts, went to the International Heifer Project loan organization that seeks to provide those living in poverty with livestock, teaching them how to provide for themselves and their families. The theme of Benefit Night was "Tour de Southeast." Bicycles and other cycles were made by clubs and groups in the school much like the Tour de Lincoln bicycles. They were then sold in a silent auction. Sarah was a driving force and major organizer. As a testament to her willingness to teach others about women's issues, Sarah personally took on the task of getting a group of high school volunteers to canvas a neighborhood in the Safe Quarters campaign for Friendship Home. As an officer of the Psychology Club at Southeast, she is now putting together activities for Mental Health Awareness Week in April. Sarah has also volunteered helping with the Families and School Together (FAST) program in conjunction with one of Lincoln's Community Learning Centers. She is part of the planning team of the Christian Church Disciples of Christ Youth Council, planning a spring event to discuss domestic violence and to educate young women about abusive relationships. She has also been part of Teen Court, a community group that distributes information on initiatives such as "Try Another Way," a gender specific program that educates young women about relationships. She has also served as a youth representative on the state level of the Christian Church of Disciples, and as a camp counselor for girls at Kamp Kaleo. (Contact info, 483-1121 or 472-3656, mt10648@alltel.net)

For more information or to make reservations, contact the Lincoln-Lancaster Women's Commission, 441-7717. These recipients will be honored for their professional and/or personal efforts in promoting opportunities for women, improving the quality of their life and making an impact on women's issues.